
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	452 New Jersey Avenue, SE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	March 28, 2013	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	13-145	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Frances McMillen	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Applicants John Crain and Sharon Ryan, with drawings prepared by architect Jeff Hains, seek concept review for the reconstruction of the front façade, construction of a rear addition, repair of brick retaining walls, and alterations to the interior of 452 New Jersey, SE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

Constructed in the mid-19th century, 452 New Jersey, SE is one of a coordinated row of two-story, flat-front Italianate rowhouses. Common features include matching fenestration, wood cornices and brackets, and front entrances accessed by stone or iron stairs. The subject property's first floor entrance and transom were altered at an unknown date and replaced by a six-over-six window; the house is currently accessed at the cellar level. Also at an unknown date, the first floor interior walls were removed and the space converted to an open floor plan. The rear of the house includes a center doorway on the first floor accessed by a short flight of brick stairs and an entrance at the cellar level.

Proposal

The proposal calls for the reconstruction of the house's front façade, a two-story rear addition, demolition and construction of interior walls on all three of the house's floors, and the replacement of the front elevation windows.

A structural engineer's report and photographs included with the application documents that the front façade is vertically bowed from the foundation and roof and that the outer wythe of brick has separated from the wall. Retaining walls at the front and rear of the property are also damaged and in need of repair. The plans call for reconstructing the front façade using the original salvaged brick, window sills, lintels, and cornice. The current six-over-six windows will be replaced by two-over-twos and the front entrance will be enlarged from 28" to 36" to comply with building codes.

The proposed addition extends the rear wall approximately 5 feet and includes a slightly projecting bay on the third floor. As with the front elevation, the rear wall of the addition will

incorporate salvaged brick from the existing rear wall. The new rear elevation will have a slightly different fenestration and door pattern.

Interior work includes the removal of non-load bearing walls on each floor, widening of staircases to meet code, and the extension of the cellar beneath the rear patio. The first floor will retain its current open plan. The floor plans of the cellar and third story will be reconfigured and existing walls removed. The house's roof and the floor assemblies will be retained.

Evaluation

While the historic preservation regulations define removal of a façade as constituting demolition that is inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act (DCMR 10A 305.1 (a) “the removal or destruction of any façade”), the engineer’s report and accompanying photographs, confirmed by a site visit by the HPO, make clear that the pronounced bowing of the façade will require reconstruction in order to ultimately preserve the building. Such separation of the outer wythe of brick is not uncommon on buildings from the mid to late 19th century. While the use of tie-rods can often provide a solution to minor deflection of an exterior wall, the extent of bowing in this instance is too great for that option. The use of salvaged brick and the return of the cornice, sills, lintels and other character defining features will preserve the physical fabric and historic appearance of the building.

The rear addition is modest in size and compatible in materials and fenestration with the house and the historic district. The reconstruction of retaining walls and rear basement stairs will not affect significant character-defining features and are also compatible in size and material. As the interior alterations will not result in the removal of the floor or roof assemblies, the scope of work does not constitute demolition under the preservation regulations.¹

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the proposed reconstruction of the front façade, rear addition, and alterations to be compatible with the character of the historic district and consistent with the purposes of the preservation act, and that final approval be delegated to the staff.

¹ 305.1: Work considered demolition under the Act shall include, but is not limited to, any of the following, as determined by the Mayor’s Agent:

- (a) The removal or destruction of any façade;
- (b) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the structural components of the building, such as structural walls, floor assemblies, and roofs;
- (c) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the roof along with all or substantially all of one or more exterior walls;
- (d) The removal or destruction of all or substantially all of an entire wing or appendage of the building, such as a rear ell, unless the wing lacks physical or historic integrity, or is not a character-defining feature;
- (e) The removal or destruction of a substantial portion that includes character-defining features of the building or structure;
- (f) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of a designated interior landmark, unless the elements to be removed lack physical or historic integrity, or are not character-defining features; or
- (g) Any removal or destruction requiring a partial demolition or raze permit under the D.C. Construction Code, including any demolition of non-bearing walls, interior finishes, or other interior non-bearing elements within a building where an interior space has been designated as a historic landmark.